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Master of Arts thesis abstract

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Abstract

This study maps the relationship between male homosexuality and mainstream film from two different point of views: identification and othering. These two perspectives form, as it were, two sides of a “coin”, in which different audiences, through similar processes of visual cultural, create different symbolic meanings for the popular culture presentation they observe. The author's personal cinematic experiences as a young gay man are reflected in the perspective of the study as well as in the choice of the research material.

The master's thesis consists of two complementary essays:

1. The essay on identification addresses its subject through Film Noir’s standard character, Femme Fatale, examining gay men’s identification with women and female characters as well as their worshipping, as common in gay culture. Influencing factors in these identifications are the various manifestations of visual culture that are characteristic and recognizable for gay men, most importantly the exaggerated, subversive and parodic aesthetic of camp, which is, according to Richard Dyer, uniquely emblematic to gay culture.

2. Othering, on the other hand, is discussed in the context of monsters in horror films, based on the metaphor invented by Harry M. Benshoff, according to which the monsters of horror films can historically be understood as a representation of homosexuality. According to the essay, both monsters and gays are subject to the fears and anxieties of a heteronormative audience, as a kind of scapegoat, through which perceptions of the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and the sick are maintained. The dissertation falls within the frameworks of queer and feminist film research, in relation to gay representations - viewed from inside and outside of the gay community.

The most important thinkers and texts for the dissertation are Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet (1990), Alexander Dotyn's Making Things Perfectly Queer (1993), Harry M. Benshoff's Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film (1997) and Richard Dyer's The Culture of Queers (2002).

Keywords Visual Culture, Gay Culture, Camp, Queer, Cinema

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Tiivistelmä
Tutkielma kartoittaa miesten homoseksuaalisuuden suhdetta valtavirran elokuvaan kahdesta eri perspektiivistä, samaistumisen ja toiseuttamisen näkökulmista. Nämä kaksi perspektiiviä muodostavat ikään kuin "kolikon" kaksi puolta, joissa eri yleisöt, samankaltaisten visuaalisen kulttuurin prosessien kautta, luovat erilaisia symbolisia merkityksiä näkemäänsä populaarikulttuurin esitykseen. Kirjoittajan omakohtaiset elokuvalliset kokemukset nuorena homomiehenä peilautuvat tutkielman näkökulmassa sekä aineiston valinnassa. Maisterin opinnäyte muodostuu kahdesta toisiaan täydentävästä esseestä:
1. Samaistumista käsittelevässä esseessä aiheeseen paneudutaan Film Noirin vakiohahmon, Femme Fatalen kautta, tutkien homokulttuurissa yleistä naisiin ja naishahmoihin samaistumista, sekä näiden naisten palvontaa. Samaistumiseen vaikuttavia tekijöitä ovat erilaiset homomiehille ominaiset ja tunnistettavat visuaalisen kulttuurin ilmenemismuodot, tärkeimpänä liioitteleva, yhteiskunnallista järjestystä kyseenalaistava ja parodioiva camp-estetiikka, joka on Richard Dyerin mukaan homokulttuurille ainutlaatuinen ja sitä määrittävä muoto.
2. Toiseuttamista taas käsitellään kauhuelokuvan hirviöiden kautta, lähtökohtana Harry M. Benshoffin keksimä vertauskuva, jonka mukaan kauhuelokuvien hirviöt voidaan historial-lisesti käsittää representaationa homoseksuaalisuudelle. Esseen mukaan sekä hirviöt että homot ovat heteronormatiivisen yleisön pelkojen ja ahdistusten kohteena, eräänlaisina syntipukkeina, joiden kautta ylläpidetään käsityksiä normaalista ja epänormaalista, terveestä ja sairaasta. Tutkielma sijoittuu queer- ja feministisen elokuvantutkimuksen viitekehykseen, suhteessa homo-representaatioihin — homoyhteisön sisä- ja ulkopuolelta tarkasteltuna.
Tutkielman kannalta tärkeimpiä lähdeteoksia ovat Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin Epistemology of the Closet (1990), Alexander Dotyn Making things perfectly queer (1993), Harry M. Benshoffin Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film (1997) sekä Richard Dyerin The Culture of Queers (2002).

Avainsanat Visuaalinen kulttuuri, homokulttuuri, camp, queer, elokuva

FOUND IN TRANS-LATION

> *All people in all societies inherit and bequeath frameworks of understanding and feeling about themselves and everyone else. These frameworks include various kinds of categories of persons. We find and refuse to find ourselves in these categories, live with, within and against them, but never actually without them. They provide locations and a vast set of codes wherein and with which we can speak, create, doodle, in short, make culture.*
> (Dyer 2005, p. 1).

While I consider my gay identity mostly a strength, there is always a lack present. Of course, all identities are incomplete somehow, and one might argue that we all are lacking something. However, some identities can lean on tradition, or the norms. None of us are only one thing, so one might find meaning and sense of history or meaning in national identity or family, even if they belong to any minority. I feel—and here I indeed go with a hunch—what gay identities might lack, especially in the Finnish context, is historicity.

Queer people can be found everywhere, on every continent, country, culture, ethnicity and language group. I have often romanticized the idea that my ancestors are not only those with whom I align through "blood" or nationality, but also those with whom I share this thing called homosexuality. And so in this thesis one my goals is to emphasise a shared identity and history. My thoughts are not representing all gay

men, but despite the personal grasp, they are not representing only me either. I have tried to avoid excessive (academic) navel-gazing by writing about things that are recognizable and evident in the gay/queer culture, especially to those who are a part of it.

Despite speculating about the Finnish gay identities' lack of historicity, it seem most of the scholars I refer to in my research are American or English. There are couple of reasons for this. The literature in the field of visual culture is naturally much vaster in the English-language academy. The scholars who have mostly spoken to me through their texts are Harry M. Benhoff, Alexander Doty and Richard Dyer. There is some great research done in the intersects of arts, media and queer studies in Finland, as well, and my thesis is also inspired by the works of Leena-Maija Rossi, Annamari Vänskä and Lasse Kekki.

Personally, I have always—since a very young age—been more inclined to identify with women and monsters, than, let us say, men and masculinity. Especially identification with women is very common in the gay culture as is apparent for me, from being part of gay culture, but also from contemporary biographies and academic writings.

While doing my research, I experienced some frustrations at first: even though the feminist and queer texts supply invaluable points of views about cinema, queer spectatorship, as well as "alternative reading" methods, something seemed to be missing. Numerous texts provide queer readings of popular movies, and some of them point out — very matter-of-factly

— that gay men idolize famous women, it seemed that the arguments did not go much deeper than that. For example, Alexander Doty (1993) acknowledges that gay culture is "built around the imposing, spectacular women stars", who gay men identify with and he assumes that this identification happens "through processes" of "conscious personal choice, or from internalizing long-standing straight imperatives that encourage gay men to think themselves as 'not men'...or from some degree of negotiation between these two processes (p. 6).

Finally, I found Stephen Maddison's (2000) writings where he argues that "we still lack analysis which systematically maps the conditions through which relationships between gay men and women are meaningful, and relates the formation of such relationships to questions about the nature of gender, and the nature of homosexuality itself" (p. 9). At this point it was clear, that my thesis should lean towards mapping out this "nature of homosexuality", by examining the cross-gender identifications of gay men. Furthermore, Daniel Harris has argued that the emphasis on masculinity and the need to escape cross-gender identifications has led to the rejection of the effeminate man as undesirable and to his absence from theoretical analyses of homosexual desire[1].

Throughout history, homosexuality has been associated with femininity, and not gratuitously. Gay men themselves have embraced femininity while also being ashamed of it. Even inside the gay community, expressing femininity as a man can manifest in prejudices or bullying—ironically, homo-

phobia has a strong correlation with the belief in traditional gender roles.

As this thesis in part of my studies in the field of art education, my main focus will be in visual culture, cinema in particular. I have written two essays about homosexuality and cinema, and both essays have a distinct subject, but they intersect with each other. First essay *Femme Fatale — a Gay Man in a Woman's Body* is about gay men's identification with female charcters in films, where as the second essay, *Monsters and Queers — How to Read Bodies* deals with the subject of homosexuality as a monstrous condition, through Harry M. Benshoff's (2001) concept "the homosexual as a monster." These two subject matters, for me, represent two sides of the same coin — identification *and* othering of gay men— which most likely are rooted in the same cultural norms, but perceived through different lenses.

These subjects are inspired by the movies I have watched and identified with as a teenager in the '90s. I am also quite fond of the gay and lesbian studies as well as queer studies of the '90s. Many texts from these fields in that era resonate with me strongly and so I have highlighted them, in conversation with more recent texts.

PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENTS

Gay men's identification with female movie characters is a subject which I started exploring in my Bachelor's Thesis in 2014 and continued in an article Shadow Superheroes (2018) in a book Feminism and Queer in Art Education, published by Aalto ARTS Books. Now in my Master's Thesis, I am continuing this theme and expanding it into an examination of a larger scope of characters and themes important to queer culture.

Cinema and childhood/adolescence has also been my interest in my artistic practise, for example in Boys of Summer (2014), an installation with a video montage of beautiful young men in popular culture (music videos, cinema), a reappropriated, enlarged and photoshopped frame from a Superman comic book and a (love) letter I had written to a friend, another boy, when I was around 5 years old. In 2015, a five-channel video installation with the name Pervert Art I (After Zizek's famous quote) features imagery from movies and music videos, each video looping through different lenghts, forming new combinations and associations with each view.

Figure 1. Pervert Art I, 2015. (Mariah Carey singing "Petals" and crying on stage (2001), Sharon Stone in Basic Instinct (1992), Sigourney Weaver in Alien3 (1993), Ryan Philippe in Cruel Intentions (1999) and two naked men playfully wrestling in water in Sebastiane (1976).

> *In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality has only rarely been depicted on the screen. When it did appear, it was there as something to laugh at -- or something to pity -- or even something to fear. These were fleeting images, but they were unforgettable, and they left a lasting legacy. Hollywood, that great maker of myths, taught straight people what to think about gay people... and gay people what to think about themselves. —The Celluloid Closet, 1981.*

Contemporary visual culture is made up of pictures that are largely unexplored yet have a lot of potential to touch people. Movies occupy an undoubtedly strong position in our visual culture. Films are common, popular, and entertaining. They appeal to our emotions and provide material for identification, contributing to the formation of identities. Films function in my thesis as a frame of reference and as a mirror of society, transmitting cultural knowledge. Films exude desire and fantasy, as well as fears and horror (deLauretis 2002).

In these ways, movies are involved in meaning-making and image construction. Like myths and fairytales, they affect the ways in which we, the audience, conceptualize and understand the world around us, by their powerful involvement in the discourse.

Homosexuality has always been present in movies, since the beginning of cinema. Interestingly, coining of the term homosexuality, and the invention of moving pictures,

coincide in the end of the 19th Century. In the early comedies of 1910s and 1920s, gay characters were mainly a joke. As Vito Russo describes in *The Celluloid Closet (1982)*, which traces back homosexuality in Hollywood movies: "Enter the Sissy—Hollywood's first gay stock character. The Sissy made everyone feel more manly or more womanly by occupying the space in between. He didn't seemed to have a sexuality, so Hollywood allowed him to thrive."

During the Second World War, Hollywood started to portray gay men and women more and more as sadists and psychopatchic villains, largely due to a censorship code, which allowed "sexual perversion" as a filmic content, but only if it was portrayed negatively. After all, homosexuality was still a mental illness back then.

DATA

The main visual research material for my thesis were movies, mainly from the 90's, or older movies from the '80s, which I have seen later, in the '90s. Originally I planned to concentrate on specific movies in both of my essays, but in the process of writing, the scope of my research broadened and changed. Especially regarding *Monsters and Queers* essay, which now deals with the figure of monster, especially vampires, from a more abstract and broad point of view. *Femme Fatale* essay´s focus is still mainly in *Basic Instinct* (1992) as I originally planned, but also with a broader touch. The compass of this thesis is rather narrow. I concern myself chiefly with Ameri-

can mainstream cinema, with films from the 80's and early '90s, as I mentioned.

The initial research was rather easy, the very films that have been the most dear and impactful for me, have often been under a satisfying amount of interest by feminist/queer scholars—surprisingly or not. As these movies are mostly successful mainstream Hollywood movies, part of their large cultural impact is simply in the sheer volume of audience they have managed to attract. However, this is only one part of the story. It seems to be certain movies that are again and again referred to. My selection of materials is not an exhaustive representation of movies popular among gay and queer culture, nor attempts to be; instead, by presenting a small slice of life, I aim to contribute to a larger picture.

THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

This research situates itself in humanistic tradition, connected to the ideologically engaged field of visual studies. In the tradition of critical theory, this thesis has a critical stance toward prevailing ideologies and oppressive power structures. Most of the theoretical framework is based around feminist and queer writers such as — but not limited to — Harry M. Benshoff, Judith Butler, Alexander Doty and Richard Dyer, in the intersect of cinema, feminist and queer theory.

My method is narrative, typical for qualitative research, ie. I use an approach based on the description and interpretation of the phenomena. As this paper also has an au-

toethnographic side, the subject matter, perspective and the thematic choices are partially based on lived experience. In addition to the reading of film characters, I draw from gay culture and myself, trying to express something private, but generalizable. In autoethnographic research the researcher's own voice and vision are strongly preserved in the research.

On a very practical level, after deciding which movies and texts might be fruitful to be presented in the context my thesis, I went through lots of texts about these films and themes present in them. Then, I reflected upon them with my lived experience, in order to find things that resonate with my embodied understanding of being a queer person drawn to femininity. Next, I drew an outline of the most essential thematic elements related with homosexuality in visual culture and picked four main concepts: *femininity, the monstrous,* and *camp*. These concepts will be the thread that runs through my research and I use as a lens to read cinematic elements as "gay" or "queer".

My thesis as visual studies and queer studies

Although visual culture can include all activies which happen by *looking,* visual studies have been often interested in visual signs and images, as well as viewership, production of images and different mediums. Visual studies are often study of representations (Rossi 2007, p. 7). Representation is a sign or a group of signs, through which people understand the world around them. Representations are also connected to power, because representations determine how we are seen and how we see others (Lahti 2002, p. 11-14). I have taken into ac-

count that visual representations do not only reflect reality, but produce it actively. Images and visual representations take part in production and replication, as well as critique, of categories of genders and sexualities (see Rossi 1999, pp. 36-38 and 2003, pp. 19-20).

Queer studies emerged to question heteronormativity and its assumed naturalness. Queer studies deconstructs cultural concepts and identities by observing the ways in which "normal" is delienated from "deviant", and how identities — and myths related with them — are produced and sustained (Karkulehto 2011, p. 80). Central to my process has been placing products of visual culture (cinema) into a dialogue with theories of gaze, cinema and queer. Psychoanalytical readings, as well as semiotic and representional approaches are common. In my thesis I approach cinematic content in ways, which can be described as close-reading or reading *against the grain*. These interpretations might be in conflict with the "primary" interpretations, but are understandable, possible and noteworthy. This kind of approach can be called as *productive look* (Rossi 2003, p. 14, 29; Silverman 1996, pp. 180-185, 222-227). In this context, cinema is a cultural text that can be read (Rossi 2003, p. 14; 29).

In this way, my reading of the movies is largely *connotative* as well as based on familiarity: the movies or characters might embody similar "essence" to that of a "homosexual sensibility" (this term will be explained later in this introduction).

Reflexivity

According to Frederick Steier (1991, p. 3, own emphasis), "reflexivity also involves becoming 'aware of our own research activities as *telling a story about ourselves*'." Researcher is thus enrooted within the research field as well as "embodied within the research process is a useful departure from linear understandings of subject-object relations" (p. 4). Reflexivity, then, can be thought to be most useful, when the embodied and emotional is closely tied with the political and social aspects of research, shifting the focus from narrow positionality towards the larger scheme of things. As Ruth Behar argues:

> The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake … a personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues.
> (Behar, 1996, p. 14).

Vänskä (2006) arguest that visual studies which draws from queer and feminist theories can expand the visibility of minoritarian point of views, by bringing forth questions related with gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class and ability (p. 41), and emphasizes that "a louder voice" is needed in the academy to the dismantle borders between "being inside and outside, between public and private knowledge, even between essential and marginal knowledge" (Vänskä 2008, 65).

Queer theory promotes the possibility of unpredictable change. Its political goal is to produce radical changes

in the symbolic order. Outside the symbolic order is the world of subjects, the necessary outside of the world of subjects. For Butler, the world of abjects consists mainly of feminine gay men and masculine lesbians and encompasses ways of being that are impossible to conceptualize in culturally acceptable ways (Butler 1993). Butler's theory, according to Tuhkanen (2005), seeks to make room for an order in which "objectified bodies would become culturally comprehensible" (p. 9).

As is common to queer theorists, in my text I will read identity as a sort of language or a discourse and while there is a risk of generalizations[2] (Turner 1993, p. 32), I will try to avoid them to the best of my ability by attempting to be as transparent as possible.

Also typical to queer theory, my text has a political motivation behind it, wanting to shed light to a minoritarian gay culture and experiences of, especially young, gay men/boys. This political approach is called identity politics which attemps to fight systems of oppression which affect people in particular race, class, social background or other identifying factor. Identity politics is often seen in social activism, for example feminist, LGBT and postcolonial movements, but also in nationalist movements and identity.

Heteronormativity

Even though during the 21st Century, representations of gay characters have increased in popular media, many scholars have attested that most of these representations

seem to be desiring to become part of heterocentric society. Scholars engaged in queer theory (e.g., Butler, 1999; Halberstam, 2005; Sedgwick, 1985; Warner, 1999) describe heteronormativity as the discursive power granted to the compulsory heterosexual matrix in Western society. Heteronormativity relies on the naturalized notions of two sexes and genders, which are opposites to each other. To fulfill its project of naturalization, heteronormativity needs to other anything and anyone deviating from its model. In this way, it attempts at "despising" or "excluding" those who do not obey or honour its institutions, practises or other sets of norms, such as marriage, reproduction, longetivity, monogamy.

"The defining homo/hetero opposition channels all subjects into embodying a fixed sexual identity, which is defined by the sex of the person they feel attracted to (Warner, 1999)." "As a consequence, many are compelled to claim a sexual minority identity or seek for inclusion and recognition by heteronormative institutions by incorporating heteronormativity." Duggan (2002) describes homonormativity as one of the subject positions, which supports heterosexual matrix, by assuming that the norms and values of heterosexuality should be replicated and performed among gay people (Dhaenens 2003, 103).

Cinema and Gay/Queer Spectatorship

Queer spectators, in the lack of representations about themselves, are known to interpret—or "read"—certain elements of movies "against the grain" to find queer elements. According to LaValley (1995) '"movies have always held a particular at-

traction" for gays because "here they found hints of a utopian and alternate world, one more congenial to their sexuality and repressed emotions"' (p. 31; Farmer 2000, p. 75). Although "queer viewers" may be thought to imply a gay, lesbian or trans identity, it is a position available for anyone who is able to adopt an anti-heteronormative perspective. It is a way of engaging that connects to individual moments, adversities, and pleasures, rather than a pre-coded identity policy.

According to Miriam Hansen (2011), for groups marginalized and excluded from dominant recognition (women, sexual, racial, and ethnic minorities), the cinema, for a long time, was an alternative horizon of experience, creating a space where they could experience – albeit in different ways – what was unavailable to them in the public space (p. 17). In *Spectacular Passions,* Brett Farmer (2000) argues that "because of their experiences of social marginalization and alienation, gay-identifying men have been particularly responsive to the escapist potentials and fantasmatic largesse of film" (p. 26). Gay men in the past were particularly drawn to films that were "saturated with expressive colors, dance and songs, chic costumes and style full of charm, therefore those which guaranteed the fulfillment of their wishes, hopes, and dreams." The cinema created "substitute worlds where queers were able and willing to live" — unreal, fantastic and inconceivable world (p. 75).

Most of the movies mentioned in my essays are popular mainstream movies, and many of them are produced in

Hollywood. These movies are not "meant" to be subversive or to have explicit queer content.

Camp and Gay Sensibility

> *All the images and words of the society express and confirm the rightness of heterosexuality. Camp is one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man.*
> (Dyer 2005, p. 12).

The term camp refers to "a style or mode of personal or creative expression that is absurdly exaggerated and often fuses elements of high and popular culture" and "exaggerated effeminate mannerisms (as of speech or gesture)", possibly derived from French se camper, "to pose in an exaggerated fashion" (See Sontag 1964; Dyer 2005).

Susan Sontag (1964) described camp as a way of consuming or performing culture "in quotation marks." For Sontag, the essence of camp was all "theatrical, spectacular, artificial, mannered, but also fluid, ambiguous, unstable, and extravagant." Although Sontag was able to link camp with the gay culture, she quickly noted that "if homosexuals had not invented camp, somebody else would have" (p. 45).

When camp is used as an adjective to describe gay men, it usually refers to feminine, theatrical and ironic mannerisms and/or speech.

In my thesis, I use the word camp mainly in two different meanings. First, when describing camp as a quality of a movie or aesthetics, the word often refers to over the top, exaggerated, comical and selfconscious style (Dyer 2005). In

horror movies, camp functions as a distancing factor between the image and the viewer: violence and horror is easier to face — not to be taken seriously — and even to find it comical when it is dressed up as camp.

The second use of the word camp is to describe a mode, which is largely synonymous with "gay sensibility." Camp has been described by Richard Dyer as the "emblematic feature" of gay culture: "what soul is to black, camp is to gay". Theatrical camp qualities are common in the gay culture, many of the gay icons are indeed camp: Judy Garland, Cher, Kylie Minogue, Lady Gaga and so forth.

According to Dyer, "Camp is one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man" and "It is just about the only style, language and culture that is distinctively and unambiguously gay male", and is thus a significant part of "identifying and belonging" for gay men (p. 49).

Camp takes nothing seriously and can be thought of as a form on self-protection, ability to both laugh at your own condition as well as critique cultural hierarchies, by mocking them: camp is "a weapon against the mystique surrounding art, royalty and masculinity" (Dyer 2002). The development of camp sensibilities seems quite "natural": early on many gay men realize that the societal roles and preconceptions about gender and "normal" sexuality are make-belief, that heterosexuality is as much a performance as anything else. Sarcastic humor and theatricality—or camp—then, attempts to reveal the pretense).

As camp is in the heart of gay culture, it is not surprising that many common (and well-known) gay interests are in the fields of artifice and (camp) aesthetics: fashion, theater, opera, ballet or baroque art are all very camp forms of entertainment and art (Sontag 1963).

In this way, camp also serves my thesis as a method, which can be called camp reading. It allows me to use my own "gay sensibility" when interpreting popular culture and movies.

Couple of years back, Judith Butler's Gender Trouble was discussed at my university's feminist reading circle, consisting of a handful of teachers and students. I remember that me and a fellow queer student (and a friend) both recognized Butler's theory of gender performativity as a logic that we had embodied since we were very young. In other words, although we learned from Butler's theory for the first time now, her theory was familiar to us, almost in an uncanny way it described the worldview of the queer child we both had been.

In my thesis, camp functions as "a parodic strategy originating from gay subculture which provides an impetus for subtextual reading", interlapping with feminist and queer reading, camp reading, "bringing a specific "gay sensibility" up front. (Drukman 1995; Cooper 2012, 87).

Identification

The subject of identification is featured most explicitly in the essay *Femme Fatale*, where I discuss gay men's identification with women and cinematic female characters. Gay men have a long history with femininity and we have often cher-

ished famous women as role models, instead of, for example, male athletes. This is emblematic to many gay individuals long before direct participation in the gay culture. This type of identification is sometimes called cross-identification or disidentification (see e.g. Sedgwick 1190 and Muñoz 2000), which both refer to identifications over identity groups, in other words, to identifications outside of coded norms, which are "not supposed to happen".

In the context of cinema, identification is not easy to define as there is not one consensus of what the word means. Some writers suggest that the audience imagines themselves as a movie character and internalize different sides of character's identity, whereas some others emphasize identification as a process more to do with lack than familiarity, claiming identification happens when the audience sees some charasteristics they lack, and want to become like the fictional character. It seems that identification might require a balance between familiar and unfamiliar: a character that is too "close to home" might not be identifiable, but neither is someone too distant and strange.

On a most basic level, identification in cinema is understood as a necessary phenomena for us to enjoy a movie at all: we must have a certain amount of understanding and sympathy to be able to follow the story and motivations of people in the story, and our identification moves from one character to another during the course of the movie.

Gender/Sex

Sex, gender and sexuality are culturally very influencial parts of identity as they can dictate to a significant degree how one views themselves or others. They are also a significant factor in identifications. From a heteronormative point of view it is thought that women (only) identify with other women, and men with other men.

(Biological) sex usually refers to "physical attributes", which are "physiologically and anatomically determined", as coined by sexologists John Money and Anke Ehnhardt in the 1972, whereas gender is an "internal conviction that one is either male or female", along with "behavioral expressions of that conviction". The second-wave feminists of the 70's had a similar view of sex and gender, claiming that social institutions perpetuated gender equality, argueing that while male and female bodies might have different reproductive functions, few other sex differences are relevant in the every day life.

Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000), Professor Emeritus of Biology at Brown University, questions the realities of sex in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. She argues that "our bodies are too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference. The more we look for simple physical basis for 'sex', the more it becomes clear that 'sex' is not a pure physical category". She provides an example, asking if a child is a boy or a girl, if they have "two X chromosomes, ovaries, oviducts, and a uterus on the inside, but a penis and scrotum on the outside". In an earlier publication, the ground-breaking article *Five Sexes*, Fausto-Sterling

(1993) declared that there were at least five different biological sexes, which she (ironically) named male, female, merm, ferm, and herm (p.).

In 2007, biopsychologist Sari van Anders coined the term gender/sex, because in her views, gender and sex cannot be separated in shaping human behaviour - instead, they are deeply interwoven. Gender/sex has since become a central tenet in Fausto-Sterling's work. In a recent speech at EUI, she argued that "[identity] should be seen as a life-long process that resides in the body and can evolve over time". According to her, "[m]any things that have been thought of as sex, are really gender/sex, as they exist in the intersection of body and culture". Gender/sex can thus be seen as an embodiment, a construction of identity deeply tied to the body.

Fausto-Sterling's and van Anders' views resonate strongly with me and they provide an important undertow in my thesis. When I talk about men, women, males, females, gay men or lesbians, I am referring to cultural and self-identified categories of sex, gender (or gender/sex), making no assumptions about the biological reality of any individuals, nor claiming any biologically essentialist identity or body.

Genre

Genre is the movie's gender (these two English words have a common root on Old French and Latin). It is a significant factor in the (queer) viewer's experience and it has been suggested that certain film genres can themselves be considered queer: film noir, horror movies, musicals and animated films depict worlds where queer forces can roam wild and free, as

do sci-fi and fantasy, with magic, bizarre creatures and advanced technologies. They mimic reality by creating an alternative, twisted model of it - in other words, a queer reality. As in Butler's frequently quoted example, cinema can produce parodic double imitation, just as drag queens, macho gays, butch and feminine lesbians make parody of the gestures, expressions, postures, clothing, and "essence" of their heterosexual "original".

RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

This thesis examines how gay identity and homosexuality are represented in movies, specifically in the genres film noir and horror. When discussing any kind of cultural content, queer refers to antinormativity. For example, a "queer movie character" does *not* refer to character who is explicitly represented as gay, lesbian or transgender, but it refers to a representation which resists normative reading. Queer is a mode which can resist all established identities, including readily available gay identities.

In the field of visual culture, representations are sometimes examined literally and explicitly: for example Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone in Basic Instinct can be thought as a representation of a woman. However, in the context of my thesis, the term representation is used in its more metaphoric and symbolic meaning: I examine the femme fatale and monsters as representations of gay men and homosexuality.

Research questions in this thesis are thus as follows. How are gay men and homosexuality represented in mainstream films, in characters that are not explicitly gay men? How do gay men experience identification with female characters in films? What are the typically "gay" ways of looking at cinema and it's characters, plots, and themes ? How is homophobia linked or projected into monsters of horror films?

ESSAYS

FEMME FATALE — A GAY MAN IN A WOMAN'S BODY

VOICES/TOUCHES

Surely, whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her I shall follow,
As the water follows the moon, silently, with fluid steps, anywhere around the globe.
—Walt Whitman, Voices, Leaves of Grass, 1900

I came to learn about Walt Whitman through a song "Sanctuary" by Madonna in 1994. In the songs lyrics, Madonna layered verses from the Genesis: "*And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the earth*" as well as Whitman's poem *Voices.*

Whitman, one of America's most influential poets, and (most likely) a gay man, declares in his poem the gravitational pull of speaking "*in the right voice"* as a law of the universe. He promises that all that is hidden, all truths, will be revealed in time, "*(u)ntil that comes which has the quality to bring forth what lies slumbering, forever ready, in all words".*

At this point, Madonna had been one of my idols for some time, just like as she has been and is to many other gay boys and gay men. By incorporating musical and visual references to painting, poetry and golden age cultural icons from outside of her own genre of mainstream pop, she both fascinated and educated me. My gay fanboy connection with Madonna was not only intellectual, cerebral or representational, it was also a bodily experience; She spoke to me in the right voice.

A WOMAN'S SOUL TRAPPED IN A MAN'S BODY

Cross-gender identifications are common to gays and lesbians, often from a very early age. Strong women—and divas—are idolized by many gay men. I, too, have identified more often with women and femininity than masculinity, especially regarding movies and movie characters. Benshoff and Griffin (2005) have argued, that while identifying across genders is relatively common among gay men (and other queer-identified people), straight men do not tend to identify with women (p. 11). In this sense this phenomena is descriptive of gay culture—or at least very common in it.

The main character of this essay is Catherine Tramell, from *Basic Instinct* (1992). For me, at the tender age of 15, Catherine signified a powerful and indestructible entity. There was an instant recognition of something of me in her.

The invention of the term "homosexuality[3]" in 1869, which shifted the focus from all-encompassing deviant behavior to a "narrower issue of sexual object choice," allowed this subject to cross the "threshold of science" (Sedgwick 1990, p. 158) and gain a new kind of validity. Before this invention, gay men and homosexuality had been referred to in various, primarily negative ways, for example, sodomites (biblical reference) and sexual inverts ("scientific" term by 19th Century sexologists). In Britain, homosexuals were sometimes called

3 First appeared in 1869, in a pamphlet published anonymously by Karl-Maria Kertbeny (1824–82).

"buggers" after Bulgarian heretics, thus linking homosexuality with heresy and something that comes outside a nation or culture (Ellis 1927/2004).

In the 1800s, there were also attempts to create more positive and self-descriptive terminology by gay men themselves, such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' (1862) Uranian (later Germanized into Urning), from the Greek goddess Aphrodite Urania, who was created out of the god Uranus' testicles. Ulrichs described Uranians (and himself) as *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*, a woman's soul trapped in a man's body (Ellis 1927/2004; Sedgwick 1990, p. 158). Superficially, Ulrich's description does not differ much from the concept of *a sexual invert*. However, the difference is that Ulrich's description attempts to validate, whereas sexual inversion implies a psychological condition requiring treatment, a *degeneracy*.

"A woman's soul trapped in a man's body" thus serves this essay—about gay men's (cross-)identification with women—as a metaphor. In the spirit of camp, this metaphor is not to be taken literally, but tongue-in-cheek. The use of these metaphors does not suggest that there is a soul or a consciousness separate from the body or that our bodies embody some kind of male or female "essence."

CULTURAL BOND

Women and gay men share a historical and cultural bond of *otherness*. In a time when portrayals of homosexuality in theater or cinema have been unpopular or even forbidden, writ-

ers could give female characters features, according to which a gay audience could "recognize" these characters as representations of homosexuality. According to Lasse Kekki (2010), for example, playwrights Tennessee Williams and William Inge often added these elements to their plays; homosexuality could be referred to through themes of shame, guilt, depression, or captivity and suffering (p. 46-47; p. 74-75.). Especially *fantastic* literature has always contained depictions of homosexuality, both female and male. It has also contained portraits of androgynes, gender-switching people, and alien sexuality that is clearly not heterosexual. In the centuries before writers could deal explicitly with homosexuality, they used fantastic literature's various forms to disguise homoerotic passions (Garber and Paleo 1990, p. vii).

In the world of cinema, many directors who in their private lives were "interested only in men", adored and even worshiped their actresses. Sebastian Jagielski (2016) writes in the article *Queer fantasies: the camp prince, the diva, and Polish cinema in the interwar period* as follows:

> George Cukor made films about women, in which he placed "gay icons" (Judy Garland, Katherine Hepburn, Audrey Hepburn), Luchino Visconti explored the phenomenon of the diva (Anna Magnani, Claudia Cardinale, Romy Schneider, Silvana Mangano), and Pier Paolo Pasolini cast the opera diva Maria Callas in the title role of *Medea* (1969). The masquerade of femininity has always been–-especially for artists in the pre-emancipation era–-a

> way to articulate their own sensitivity. These artists took refuge in the fictional world of homoerotic fantasies, and that world provided them – thanks to giving life to men that they desired – with illusory fulfillment.
> (p. 7).

Alexander Doty (1993) has stated, that "at the center of gay culture cults built around the imposing, spectacular women stars" are gay men, who identify with women or femininity" (p. 6). Doty suspects that this identification happens "through processes" of "conscious personal choice, or from internalizing long-standing straight imperatives that encourage gay men to think themselves as 'not men'...or from some degree of negotiation between these two processes"(p. 6). For me, it is clear that Doty's "processes," through internalization from both the dominant, straight culture and from gay culture itself, can certainly reaffirm a gay man's attraction to all things feminine. However, I wonder what other kinds of processes might exist, considering that many gay men are drawn to femininity and female stars as young boys, long before being aware of their "future" sexuality and gay identity?

My first memories of strong identification with fictional female characters were around the age of seven, Dita (Sophia Loren) in a Hollywood adventure movie Legend of the Lost (1957), and Makepeace (Glynis Barber) in the English police drama Dempsey & Makepeace) (1985). Police officer Makepeace signified some kind of transcendent freedom for me. She solved crimes while paired with male police offi-

cer Dempsey (Michael Brandon) and was as successful and physical in her work as her partner, even though she was "not man." I remember being especially enchanted by the physicality of the fight scenes. Makepeace was equal to men in her fighting skills, even though she was a very feminine woman on the outside. She made me feel powerful and capable too.

In contrast to Makepeace, Dita made me feel something different. In Timbuktu, an experienced guide Joe January (John Wayne) reluctantly joins a Saharan treasure hunting expedition led by Paul Bonnard (Rossano Brazzi), a man obsessed with validating his dead father's claim to have discovered a lost city. Dita, a well-known woman, is smitten by Paul and his willingness to overlook her past. Despite Joe's protests, she invites herself along. Joe and Dita get drawn to each other during the difficult, dry experience, causing friction between them and jealous Paul. I remember being very much affected by this love triangle, dwelling in erotic and masochistic feelings over the movie plot of love and refusal. After the movie, I obsessed for weeks, in some kind of arousal and intrigue~~,~~ with the promotional picture of the movie in a weekly magazine *Seura*.

IDENTIFICATION

Gay men have a long history with femininity and having famous women as role models, instead of, let us say, male athletes. This is emblematic to many gay individuals even before any knowledge or part-taking in the gay culture. This type of identification is sometimes referred to as cross-identification

(see e.g. Sedgwick 1990) or disidentification (see Muñoz 2000), which both refer to identifications over identity groups, in other words, to identifications outside of coded norms, which are "not supposed to happen".

In the context of cinema, identification is not easy to define as there is not one consensus of what the word means. Some writers suggest that the movie audience imagines themselves as a movie character and internalize different sides of that character's identity, whereas some others emphasize identification as a process more to do with lack than famialirity, in other words, that identification happens when the audience sees some charasteristics they lack, and want to become like the fictional character.

It has been argued, that the audience can empathize with the storyline of a movie the better, the more personal the goals of a movie character are. In addition, the feeling of empathy and identification can be greatly be affected by the subject matter, theme and milieu. Teresa de Lauretis has argued, from a psychoanalytical perspective, that the fantasy of the audience is not only lived through a particular character(s) in a movie, but that the who movie is a "stage setting of desire"

It seems that identification might require a balance between familiar and unfamiliar: a character that is too "close to home" might not be identifiable, but neither is someone too distant and strange. In it's most basic level, identification in cinema is understood as a necessary phenomena for us to enjoy a movie at all: we must have a certain amount of understanding and sympathy to be able to follow the story and mo-

tivations of people in the story, and our identification moves from one character to another in the course of the movie.

My interest in this thesis, however, is something stronger than a mere sympathy. I am referring to the kinds of identifications that are more profound and transformative. According to deLauretis (2002), Stanley Cavell, a philosopher and a gay man, in his text about the film *Now, Voyager* (1942), has described as a passionate identification with "the way (Bette) Davis walks, gazes and deliveres her lines" and felt himself "amplifying her voice, hearing her, becoming her"

Interestingly, in José Esteban Muñoz's book Disidentifications (2001), has another description of a well-known gay man falling under the spell of Bette Davis. James Baldwin, in The Devil Finds Work (1976) discusses his childhood memory,:

> So here, now, was Bette Davis, on the Saturday afternoon, in close-up, over a champagne glass, popeyes popping. I was astounded. I had caught my father not in a lie, but in an infirmity. For here, before me, after all, was a movie star: white: and if she was white and a movie star, she was rich: and she was ugly… Out of bewilderment, out of loyalty to my mother, probably, and also because I sensed something menacing and unhealthy (for me, certainly) in the face on the screen, I gave Davis's skin the dead white greenish cast of something crawling from under the rock, but I was held, just the same, by the tense intelligence of the forehead, the disas-

> ter of the lips: and when she moved, she moved just like a n----r.

Muñoz goes on describing how Baldwin finds something "useful", and both "liberatory" and "horrible" in Bette Davis's "freakish beauty", enabling a way to survive as a marginalized, black and queer person through visual disidentification (p.10).

This kind of decoding and reconstruction of culturally coded meanings is characteristic of many queer individuals and other minorities—not to say that it is impossible for representatives of the dominant culture either. From an early age, queer individuals often have had to read popular culture in creative ways—against the grain—and find role models less obvious. This reading usually does not take place as a conscious, pre-determined strategy, but as a kind of internal necessity. Identification does not take place in a vacuum or through established practice, but in a network of sexualities and identities (See Butler 2006) and only there. The performativity of gender—or more broadly, of identity—is created through and within the complex and compelling forces of cultural norms, as an interaction and a kind of negotiation between multidirectional forces.

BASIC INSTINCT

Continuing with the tradition of Film Noir, *Basic Instinct* (1992) began the rise of erotic thrillers in Hollywood in the 1990s, and it has since then become somewhat of a cult movie. Basic Instinct is part of the neo-noir genre, which uses elements of film noir with updated content and style.

At the time of its release, the film provoked contradictory reactions. For example, some gay activists criticized the film for its stereotypical lesbian characters, who are portrayed as cold murderers. In addition, the film's plot and characters have been criticized as illogical, unnatural, and "worthless scrap", in the words of Rolling Stone magazine's (1992) review of the movie: "But do not look for logic in Basic Instinct. In that way lies madness. Protests from the gay community about the film's negative treatment of lesbians are also pointless since no one in this kinky sex fantasy demonstrates anything resembling recognizable human behavior." Not all films are realistic, so I wonder why did Basic Instinct as a movie have expectations from some of the audience and critics to be such?

Some years later, Camille Paglia (1994) slammed anti-Basic Instinct protests by LGBT activists and feminists, praising Sharon Stone's performance as "one of the great performances by a woman in screen history," complimenting her character as "a great vamp figure, like Mona Lisa herself, like a pagan goddess" (p. 489).

Basic Instinct has since gained the status of a "camp classic" as sometimes happens to movies that were not neces-

sarily appreciated in their own time, although this is hardly the case with Basic Instinct—it was a box-office hit, grossing $352 million worldwide. Campiness is sometimes required with time, “time liberates the work of art from moral relevane, delivering it over to the Camp sensibility” (Sontag 1966, p. 21). Labelling Basic Instinct as a camp classic immediately hints at the “gayness” of the film. Its campiness is related, in my view, to the artificiality, “badness”, and over-the-topness, which was the target of the critiques back in the day.

While the acting and directing in Basic Instinct may or may not have their flaws, the observations of weirdness and artificiality in the movie and its characters can be traced back to conscious stylistic and genre-related choices: old film noir movies were, after all, quite theatrical. In addition, the fantasy-like nature of the film reveals the artificiality of identity and gender performance, generating fissures, which enable the queer interpretations of the film.

FEMME FATALE

The entity we know as Femme Fatale started her cultural quest early on; she is referred to as Eve or Salome in the Bible, Helen of Troy in ancient Greek and Cleopatra in Egypt, and she remains as "recurrent presence in both popular and high culture" as a "perennial site of uncertainty, raising challenging questions and inviting further investigation” (Hanson and Rawe 2010, p. 1). Her presence forces audiences to question their position in a patriarchal society as she holds a mir-

ror in front of them. She is frequently portrayed as a cruel, merciless, and dangerous, if not fatal, seductress who preys on men to acquire what she wants. Femme fatale is is unreadable, an enigma, a mystery, and for this reason she can also be seen as "an undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt" (Rossetti 2008, p. 12). *She is seen as a deadly threat by some and as a sign of a brighter future by others.*

The modern femme fatale is an independent agent, no longer caged by cinema noir. Femme fatale has escaped from her original genre and today we see her in other movies as often as in film noir, as she transcends the film text. Janey Place (1980) argues, even though femme fatale is often defeated—or even dies—her memory lingers in viewers' minds and keeps her alive, until her next reincarnation (p. 47). Femme fatale is "a metonym that travels among various genres, summoning film noirness for atmospheric or hermeneutic effect" (Straayer 1998, p. 151).

Noir male characters, on the other hand, are often "weak, confused, unstable […] damaged men", who do not have the same sense of morality to lean on as the typical movie hero. (Spicer 2009, p. 47). Frank Krutnik (1991/2001) calls this "pervasive problematizing of masculine identity"—is expressive of a fundamentally existentialist view of life" (p. 107).

The mysterious Femme Fatale of film noir from the 1940s and 1950s, and the openly sexual and deadly Femme Fatale of neo-noir from the 1990s and onwards, are the two primary kinds of cinematic Femme Fatale (Place 1980, p. 47).

Visually the neo-noir femme fatale is often referring to her predecessor: "She is elegantly costumed, with stiletto heels, perfectly applied make-up, and an obligatory cigarette poised between her index and middle finger" (Lindop 2014, p. 49).

Whereas in classic noir femme fatale's sexuality could only be implied due to the censorship of the time, in Neo-noir such limitations do not exist. Williams (2009) calls the weaponized spectacle of femme fatale's sexuality—in movies such as Basic Instinct, Showgirls and Wild Things—as neo-porno (p. 97-103). According to Schwichtenberg (1993), this overtly sexual mode of contemporary femme fatale can be described with the tagline of John Dahl's *The Last Seduction* (1994): "Most people have a dark side. She had nothing else" (p. 72).

As a result, whereas classic noir incorporates thriller storylines within narrative examinations of female sexuality, erotic Neo-noir makes it a clear obsession. (Stables 1998, p. 172; Straayer 1998, p. 153). According to Stables (1998), the figure of the femme fatale is reduced into an objectified carnal body by limiting it inside a set of norms imported from pornography. As a result, the challenge to patriarchy that she represents is neutralized and reduced in power (p. 178–9). Žižek's (1998) view about the contemporary femme fatale opposes Stables' formulation as he makes an argumentation in favor of the new femme fatale "who fully accepts the male game of manipulation, and as it were beats him at his own game, [which] is much more effective in threatening the paternal Law than the classic spectral *femme fatale*".

This contradiction between femme fatale's agency as a woman, and her oppression as a male fantasy, is strongly present in many of the texts regarding film noir and femme fatale. Place argues (1980) that "the myth of the strong, sexually aggressive woman first allows sensuous expression of her dangerous power and its frightening results, and then destroys it, thus expressing repressed concerns of the female threat to male dominance" (p. 36). However, it can be argued that even when the femme fatale loses her strength, the frightening power she epitomizes endures until the very end (p. 37). As Sylvia Harvey (1980) notes, "Despite the ritual punishment of acts of transgression, the vitality with which these acts are endowed produces an excess of meaning which cannot finally be contained. Narrative resolutions cannot recuperate their subversive significance" (p. 33).

This kind of reading of cinematic texts is charasteristic to feminist and queer readings. Many critics, from Elizabeth Ellsworth to Alexander Doty have noticed how queer viewers create meanings in provocative ways to mainstream films, including exploitation of connotation, ignoring movie endings and reconfigurates romances. What becomes important, is not so much how the movie text positions the viewer, but how the text can become useful to the viewer. It also needs to be noted that there are some films, where the femme fatale survives, such as Body Heat (1981), Bound (1996) and of course Basic Instinct (1992).

FEMALE MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY AS A MASQUARADE

In feminist readings of the violence of female heroes are often interpreted as non-feminist masculinization or alternatively as feminist empowerment. Coulthard (2007) has stated that naming a violent woman as a "strong woman" can be problematic because the violence is modeled after the violence of patriarchy (p. 153). I am acknowledging this conflict: just because a murderous or violent woman might be identifiable for gay men (or for other women) and admired by them, does not make a representation non-problematic. Putting beautiful and successful stars or fictional characters on a pedestal can feed into the pressures laid for the very real-life women, although it may not be the intent. Perhaps there is a side to In other words, as far as the femme fatale is a (straight) male fantasy (viite), the gay audience — interestingly — shares this hetero fantasy, but from their own perspective.

Luce Irigaray's (1977) *This Sex Which Is Not One*, is the author's commentary on the phallocentric culture, commodification of women, and their counteraction disguised within the very patriarchal structures. Women have traditionally used womanliness and female submissiveness as a tactic to build a much more unconstrained self behind such masks, according to Irigaray. To get a more unrestricted voice from patriarchal discourse and to establish themselves as the ultimate subjects of a never-ending cultural exchange, women disguise themselves as consumable object.

In Catherine Tramell's case, she can hardly be considered submissive. However, her womanliness and femininity as a surface are a tool for power in a similar logic. Catherine's powerful and impenetrable demeanor can be seen as a womanliness as a masquerade, in which women use their feminine "look" to hide their "inner" masculinity to avoid conflicts with the patriarchal status quo. In Catherine's case, the femininity and sexiness is undoubtedly a tool to survive and even to dominate: she hardly hides her masculinity—on the contrary, she is constantly provoking and manipulating, testing the social boundaries — to see what she "can get away with" (as Catherine herself refers to a murderous fictional character in her novel).

FEMME FATALE AS A GAY MAN

We can think that a woman hiding her masculinity becomes a kind of a mirrored image of a man hiding her femininity, a logic in which both embody a kind of androgynous "aura." In film noir, there is also a link between gays and the femme fatale in terms of their challenge to patriarchal society. According to Dyer (2005), "Gays function as both villains and frustrations of the heterosexual development, as do the Femme Fatales" (p. 64). For sexual fulfillment, both are reliant on the masculine hero, and "their sexual independence from the hero is undercut by the principle that no sexual satisfaction is possible away from the hero" (p. 68). As a result, Dyer contends that the man has the choice to refuse "the offer" from any of them, but that his refusal may result in his sexual adequacy

not being tested. The femme fatale and the male homosexual, regardless of the two characters' biological sex, become a source of concern because they scrutinize the patriarchal male's sexuality (p. 68).

Femme Fatale, especially the neo-noir version of her, has been criticized for her representational qualities, which emphasize the stereotype of women as scheming and manipulative, or bisexual and lesbian women as immoral murderers. On the other hand, many people have also found these strong and independent characters empowering. Herein lies a problem. The image of a woman has been harnessed by a male fantasy and turned into virgins and whores. Although Femme Fatale is portrayed as an independent and resourceful individual, the women playing them in the film industry haven't influenced their image. While many gay/queer men are part of this machinery, even though perhaps not on the top ladder, they too have their influence on the portrayal of women, especially in the fashion industry. This reminds me of Donatella Versace, who once critiqued gay fashion designers, saying they are releasing collections "for the woman they want to be."

Admittedly, many Femme Fatales might not be very realistic portrayals of real-life women and probably are not meant to be. So both the weakness and power of this archetype lies in her phantasmatic nature, which Slavoj Žižek (1998), for example, calls "the spectral aura" of "feminine mystery." Femme Fatale then, with her "spectral aura," is a model for queer existence. This idea helps me define my own experiences identifying with mostly cinematic and other

women-as-cultural-icons: in our (Western) culture women are allowed more gender-variable expressions, i.e. women can adopt masculine traits and are sometimes even praised for it. They have, culturally, easier access to the phantasmatic and queer. Men can have that access too, but men are usually not portrayed as such in the mainstream media representations. There are some enigmatic, powerful, queer male characters in the mainstream though. For example, Anthony Hopkins' portrayal of Hannibal Lecter, who shares some similar qualities to Catherine Tramell: both murderous "psychopaths" and sexually queer. Lecter also controls his environment and other people in it with unparalled intelligence in such a way that they seem to be controlling the very narrative of the movie, and like femme fatale, his presence exudes outside of the film.

CAMP AND SELF-AWARENESS

Perhaps we can now agree that Catherine's appeal and identificatory role to gay audience is related with the fantastic, *extraordinary* aura of a femme fatale and the camp—artificial, unnatural, and sometimes over-the-top—nature of Basic Instinct, the film.

Last facet of connecting Neo-noir, camp and queer in this essay, is self-awareness. The term here refers to intertextuality: a text (or a movie) can be thought to be self-aware when it refers to other texts, outside of itself. For example, parody is one form of intertextuality, pastiche is another.

Neo-noir films are inherently open for many interpretations through their evident intertextuality. Linguist Norman

Fairclough (2003) states that "intertextuality is a matter of recontextualization." Intertextuality thus reminds us to read “against the grain," as is done in feminist and queer readings. (See e.g. Rossi 2007) In other words, a movie with explicit intertextuality can be thought to encourage alternative readings, as the form or the content of a movie already implies an apparent and present subtext.

After all, Basic Instinct as a Neo-noir film, with its highly stylized visual elements, opens up the possibilities of queer readings. *Film noir* (like other fantastic genres, such as musicals, melodrama, fantasy, horror, animations) often portrays unreal and ambigious, as well as exaggerated and parodic worlds, in which queer forces can roam free (Benshoff 2002, p. 94; Benshoff 2009, p. 197). Through the uncertainty and instability of signs "built into noir's central narrative organization“ (Dyer 2005, p. 90), all of the movie's characters’ identities are rendered ambiguous and re-readable. Dyer argues that "[film noir] films are about finding out[…]you can't rely on how things look or what people say[…]the process of unraveling the mystery is confusing, full of deceptions, detours, blind alleys; the telling involves complicated, sometimes contradictory flash-backs, voice-overs, and dream sequences” (p. 90).

Basic Instinct seems to be “self-aware” about its (inter)textuality, not only through it’s parodic style of film noir, but through the narrative elements. For example, Catherine is a murderous writer who makes her texts come alive, but writing about the murders also gives her an alibi: “I'd have to be

pretty stupid to write a book about killing and then kill him the way I described in my book. I'd be announcing myself as the killer. I'm not stupid".

"What neo-noir imitates," Dyer (2005) explains, using Body Heat (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) as his main example, "is not straightforwardly noir but the memory of noir, a memory that may be inaccurate or selective" (p. 124). In other words, the imitation that this film genre produces is not a straightforward imitation, but a kind of meta-imitation, a stylized, self-aware referenciality. Camp works in a similar referencial—and parodic—way. Drag can be used as an example of this. #Many theorists point to drag shows as the epitome of camp", MacGregor Johnston (2010) writes, according to him, "The key to drag as camp is the intentional excessiveness and theatricality of performing the opposite gender. Drag performers are not impersonators: there is no attempt to deceive the spectator. In fact, the heart of the drag show is a relish for exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms." (p. 237). I am not sure if MacGregor Johnston uses the term "opposite gender" on purpose, but here it is fitting, because while drag parodies gender, it can also be seen to parody the concept of "opposite gender." Camp is a playful, hyperbolic, and parodic, deliberately drawing attention to the constructedness of a text, which can be seen to have similaritites with queer, but it is notable that queer and camp are not synonyms (Mathjis & Sexton 2012; Shugart & Waggoner 2008; Sontag 1981).

Intertextuality can also be very emotive, despite the cold-sounding, theoretical tone. Dyer (2002) describes his emotional experience watching Far From Heaven (2002), a movie in style of classic Hollywood melodramas. He describes his own response to the movie: “there were moments when I could not see the screen for crying,” even while “I was fully conscious of the way the film was doing Hollywood melodrama, was pastiche” (p. 174). Enumerating upon the multiple ways in which this film situates its twenty-first-century viewers in an affective relation to what it is pastiching narratively, aesthetically, and critically, Dyer concludes, “the pastiche of Far From Heaven not only makes the historicity of its affect evident but can also allow us to realise the historicity of our feelings” (p. 178).

Perhaps then, a gay/queer audience is able to position themselves in the movie through identification with the mysterious and the hidden—the queer. This resonates with Biddy Martin’s (1994) text *Extraordinary homosexuals and the fear of being ordinary.* Martin claims in psychoanalytically inspired diagnosis that queerness presents itself as the “extraordinary” while at the same time fleeing the charge of being “ordinary”. In other words, the seduction of queer is in the way it promises existence without limits and thus renders "normalcy" as something undesirable to a queer individual (p. 24). Perhaps here we can conclude that larger-than-life emotions attract the queer audience because "queer feels larger than life” (Doty 1993).

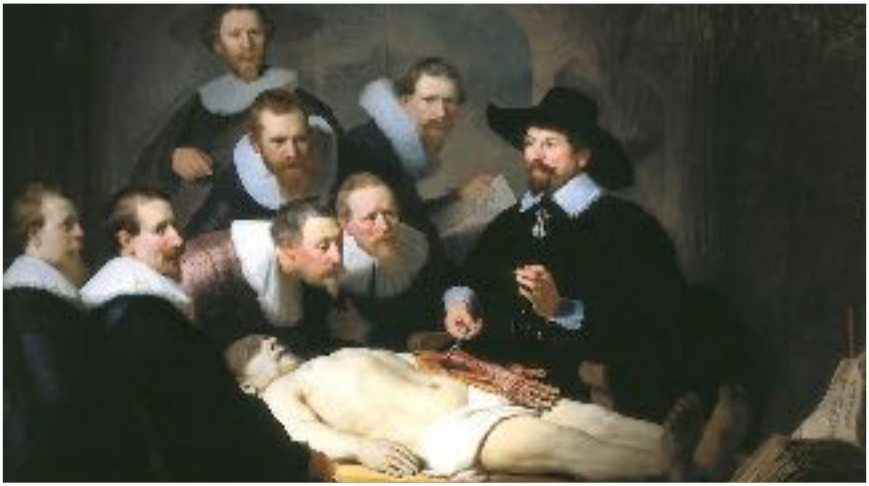
THE END

And so we are approaching the end of this essay. I see this text above all as a beginning—only the tip of the iceberg has been touched. While gay men's idolization of female stars is a fascinating—and also mysterious—subject to me, let us remember that the beautiful and glamorous women of the silver screen are not the only women we identify with. The strong friendships and bonds between real-life women and gay men remain and will continue to flourish in the future. Unfortunately this subject is somewhat "lacking in the academic as well as the popular realm" as there is a very little discussion the "issues of cross-identification," as well as "political alliances" (who? p.).

In her book *Guilty Pleasures*, Pamela Robertson (1996), one of the few critics to write about "the many close ties and friendships shared by women and gay men," laments the fact that "we have, as yet, almost no way to talk about [them]—despite their very routineness, their 'of–courseness'" (p. 8). She suggests that: "the fact that we don't talk about friendships between gay men and women reflects[…]the larger academic divisions that obtain between gay and feminist theory, as well as lesbian and gay, and heterosexual and lesbian feminist, theory" (p. 9).

Stephen Maddison aligns with the previous statement, arguing that "we still lack analysis which systematically maps the conditions through which relationships between gay men and women are meaningful, and relates the formation of such

relationships to questions about the nature of gender, and the nature of homosexuality itself" (2000, 9).



MONSTERS AND QUEERS - HOW TO READ BODIES

PART I: MONSTERS

As a film genre originating from literature by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, and Mary Shelley, horror has existed over a century. Horror movies' story line is traditionally built on the obtrusion of a diabolic force, event, or entity into the everyday world. Common monsters in horror movies are ghosts, extraterrestrials, vampires, werewolves, mummies, witches, demons, the Devil, zombies, disturbed children, psychopaths and serial killers, among others. A monster can thus be a supernatural being or a natural one, human or animal with monstrous urges, motivations or deeds.

One might argue that movie genres are usually approximations. A singular movie often has elements from various genres, which are not always clearly defined to begin with. Thus horror may mingle with the fantasy, science fiction, and thriller genres, and often does. Sometimes the genre of a movie even changes with the historical or cultural context.

It is often thought that one of the functions of a horror film is to entertain its audience by evoking fear in them. For Robin Wood (2002), the appeal of horror is due to "their fulfillment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us" (p. 32), in other words, "our identification with the Other, that which our society represses and defines as monstrous" (Jancovich 2002, p. 13).

In *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, Noël Carroll (1990) provides a detailed description of horror,

which to him signifies something associated with "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [or] Stephen King's Pet *Sematary*" (p. 12). Carroll calls the feeling evoked by these movies as *art-horror* to separate them from *natural horror*, such as being horrified, for example, "by the prospect of ecological disaster" (p. 12). Art-horror, then, is "an emotion felt in response to a fictional monster that defies our scientific understanding of the world" (p. 13). However, a monster alone is not enough to create art-horror and meet the criteria of a horror film. For example, the hairy and non-horrific Chewbacca in the Star Wars movies is one of the good guys, but in a werewolf movie a similar creature would evoke disgust and fear. Carroll makes the assumption, that in horror the monster is an "unusual character in a normal world," while in fantasy or science fiction, like Chewbacca in Star Wars, the monster is "an ordinary character in an unusual world" (Carroll 1987, p. 52).

MONSTER AS A CATEGORICAL IMPOSSIBILITY

Carroll (1987) ends up thinking that a prerequisite for a sense of art-horror is the simultaneous threat and impurity of the monster. This fusion of fear and disgust is emblematic to the genre of horror: zombies and other horrific monsters are both threatening and revolting. Impurity in Carroll's analysis refers to a trait which violates cultural order, as coined by Mary Douglas. A thing or a being is filthy, impure, if it is without a form or in some way between different categories or violates

these categories (p. 55-56). For example, the Old Testament defines the natural elements of earth, water, and the sky, and the animals that belong to them. Birds flying in the sky normally have two legs and a pair of wings, so all four-legged flying animals break against this rule and are thus unclean and disgusting. In a similar fashion, the Old Testament describes (allegedly[4]) homosexuality or same sex attraction: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.[5]" This biblical text fits into the context of a culture concerned about its members' health, familial lineages, and Israel's uniqueness as a nation (Rogers 2011). The monster can therefore be something in the wrong place, breaking the boundaries of humans and animals or place and time: extraterrestrial or ancient being, or artificial: product of science, gene manipulation or radiation (Douglas 1966; Carroll 1987, p.55). *Horror and monstrous-feminine* by Barbara Creed *(1986; 2001)* offers some examples of different types of monstrosities:

> "[i]n some horror films the monstrous is produced at the border between human and inhuman, man and beast (Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Creature from the Black Lagoon, King Kong); in others the border is between the normal and the supernatural, good

[4] The translation has been debated about, whether it refers to male prostitutes, pedastry etc. instead of homosexuality.

[5] The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

> and evil (Carrie, The Exorcist, The Omen, Rosemary's Baby); or the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not (Psycho, Dressed to Kill, Reflection of Fear); or the border is between normal and abnormal sexual desire (Cruising, The Hunger, Cat People)."
> (p. 71).

THE HOMOSEXUAL AS A MONSTER

Harry M. Benshoff (1997/2001), in his influencal text *The Monster and the homosexual*, stated that "...the figure of the monster throughout the history of the English-language horror film can in some way be understood as a metaphoric construct standing in for the figure of the homosexual" (p. 93). The interpretation of the monster of horror films as a queer relies largely on a categorical impossibility. As far as human perception of the world is characterized by language and the categories are mainly *linguistic,* it can argued that animals, beings, or bodies that do not fall into a particular category but rather between them, cause horror and anxiety because they threaten us *cognitively.* In the introduction of *The monster and the homosexual,* Benshoff (1997/2001) writes:

> "Like and evil Mr. Hyde, or the Wolfman, a gay or lesbian self inside of you might be striving to get out. Like Frankenstein's monster, homosexuals might run rampant across the countryside, claiming

> 'innocent' victims. Or worst of all, like mad scientist or vampires, who dream of revolutionizing the world through some startling scientific discovery or preternatural power, homosexual activists strike at the very foundations of society, seeking to infect or destroy not only those around them but the very concepts of Westers Judeo-Christian thought upon which civil society is built" (p. 1). Benshoff makes the assumption, that "...the figure of the monster throughout the history of the English-language horror film can in some way be understood as a metaphoric construct standing in for the figure of the homosexual"; "monster is to homosexuality, what normal is to heterosexuality," (p 91, 93).

Homosexuality and monsters are on thus the margins of the heteronormative culture and destabilize its order. They are a threat to notions of heteronormative gender and sexuality, harnessed for reproduction and idealized family values.

Gay men are not monsters only in a metaphorical, allegorical or poetic sense. Homosexuality has been largely seen as a monstrous condition in its own merit. While attitudes towards gay people have been improving in many countries in the past several decades, homophobia still exists and old notions of sickness and perversion prevail. In some countries, on the other hand, LGBTQ rights have actually gone backwards, most recently—and seemingly prominently—in Poland, where "100 municipalities covering one third of Poland have adopted resolutions declaring themselves 'LGBT ideology-free'." The

Archbishop of Krakow among some other church leaders have "condemned[…]rainbow plague", which attempts to steal away Poland. The nationalist-conservative government echoes these sentiments, as deputy justice minister Marcin Romanowski stated "We will not allow the legalisation of homosexual relationships and their adoption of children in our country. We protect Polish identity and culture from LGBT+ ideology, which is alien to us."[6]

Many scholars have shown in their search for reasons behind homophobic attitudes, that *religion* is still one of the main social factors leading to rejection and stigmatization of homosexuality. The relationship between religiosity and homophobia is thought to be based on the adoption of moral attitudes through socialization or a religious institution. Also, it seems that there is a strong correlation between traditional gender beliefs and homophobia (Durkheim, 1951; Ultee, Arts, & Flap, 2003). While most religions emphasize interpersonal respect, most religions also categorize homosexuality as "unnatural" and "unclean" (Yip, 2005).

In Wayne Plasek and Allard's (1985) study of homophobic attitudes, homosexuality was seen to been "linked in the media to child molestation, rape, and violence" and as a representation of "the destruction of the procreative nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and (to use a buzz phrase) 'family values'" (Wayne Plasek and Allard 1985, p. 23-38; Benshoff 1997/2001, p. 91).

6 BBC News 17.3.2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56412782

Such notions of homosexuality prevail stubbornly—even if less literally—in contemporary times. Almost twenty years later, in a book *Sukupuoliusko* (*sukupuoli* can be translated as *gender* or *sex*, *usko* means *faith, belief*), Sari Charpentier (2001), examines the public discourse surrounding same sex marriage in Finland, through opinion pieces in magazines. She establishes four main categories under which all writings, both those against, as well as those with more empathetic views, can be placed: (1) Christian, (2) psychological, (3) natural and (4) romantic discourse. In many of these opinion pieces, homosexuality is perceived as disgusting and unnatural, and the body of a homosexual (man) is perceived as impure, violating a sacred order. This assumed violation is thought to lead to devaluation of morality and marriage, spreading of diseases, and even compromise national security (gays in the army). In this last example, the "weak" gay man is not only unfit to defend their country, but the male body also bears a metaphoric meaning. Male body symbolizes the nation and its borders, which are rendered penetratrable by the acceptance of gay male body and anal sex. Integrity of a nation—and the straight male body—is based in its impenetrability, in other words, not being feminine. Interestingly, none of the opinion pieces were concerned with anal sex between a woman and a man (pp. 36, 94-98). Traditional masculinity and femininity lean themselves also to the concept of penetrability. The fact that gay men *allow* themselves to be penetrated, renders them as weak and less than a man.

In many countries today, the general attitude towards homosexuality remains negative, despite widespread secularization and decrease in the influence of religions (Adamczyk, 2017; McGee, 2016a, 2016b). Halman and van Ingen think this can be explained by religious factors other than services or participation in religious gatherings (Halman & van Ingen, 2015). According to Halberstam (2005), queer subcultures enable alternative conceptions of time and life outside the heteronormative lifespan of "birth, marriage, reproduction and death" (p. 2). Kekki (2010) argues, that this different mode of living is at the root of homophobia, not sexuality (p. 170).

ABJECTION, OTHER AND PROJECTION

Abjection refers to the reaction, such as disgust or horror, that arises when an object or a concept threatens the boundaries between self and the other—subject and object. Abject is something that has come out but should have stayed hidden. (Kristeva 1980). An abject body, like Douglas' or Benshoff's monster, is a body which one should not identify with. Its opposite, ideal body, is formulated by excluding what is not ideal, and this excess produces notion of non-ideal and abject body. In fiction, the abject body can be, for example, a deformed monster, a werewolf breaking the categories of man and animal, or a body breaking the category of living and dead, such as a vampire or a zombie. Non-fictional—real-life

—abject bodies can be, for example, a body of a disabled person, an AIDS-ravaged body or a racialized body.

To Kristeva (1991), it is our own inner strangeness, a creepy foreignness, that creates ghost stories and which we project onto the *Others* of our society, such as gays, or immigrants. Thus, the abject or the Other is not only outside uof us, but also within everyone—although repressed and then projected on the outside of the self. Our inner strangeness is all that was supposed to remain in the dark, but threatens to come to the surface, as the Others present in the society constantly remind us of our own frailties and weaknesses (pp. 195-196). In movies, otherness often manifests in a concrete, material form as monstrous bodies. For example, recurring theme in David Cronenberg's movies is the ability of the human body to transform beyond humanity, physicality and sexuality.

Projection refers to the psychological process of displacing one's feelings onto a different person or group, it is described by the American Psychological Association as "a defense mechanism in which unpleasant or unacceptable impulses, stressors, ideas, affects, or responsibilities are attributed to other". The term is most commonly used to describe defensive projection—attributing one's own unacceptable urges to another.[7] In other words, projection is one of the main mechanisms of othering—and scapegoating.

[7] https://dictionary.apa.org/projection 10.8.2021.

As a movie genre, horror is one of the least appreciated genres; it is often considered unrealistic, tacky, and cheap. For example, *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) was famously marketed as a crime/thriller movie instead of horror, in order to be nominated in the Academy Awards and to ensure the movie's credibility. Because horror film is not taken seriously but is considered to be "just entertainment", it has had an exceptional opportunity to convey some of our primal and suppressed desires and fears (Wood 2001, p. 30).

The film audience can project unwanted fears and anxities into the story of the film. In this way, we can consider horror movies to provide insight to the collective fears of humanity (p. 27), for example: sexuality or sexual desires in general, ("notably bisexuality and homosexuality", as Wood formulates), female sexuality and creativity, and sexuality of childen, ethnic groups and alternative ideologies, among others (p. 27-28). Bisexuality, both literally and metaphorically, represents, according to Wood, the most obvious threat to the principle of monogamy and the romantic myth of a singular partner, "the right one". Similarly, homosexuality is a threat to sexuality harnessed to the ideal of reproduction and family (p.27).

Benshoff (1997/2001) aligns with Woods views, arguing that:

> these monsters can often be understood as racial, ethnic, and/or political/ideological Others, while more frequently they are constructed primarily as sexual Others (women, bisexuals, and homosexu-

> als). Since the demands of the classical Hollywood narrative system usually insist on a heterosexual romance within the stories they construct, the monster is traditionally figured as a force that attempts to block that romance. As such, many monster movies (and the source material they draw upon) might be understood as being "about" the eruption of some form of queer sexuality into the midst of a resolutely heterosexual milieu. By 'queer,' I mean to use the word both in its everyday connotations ('questionable . . . suspicious . . . strange . . .')
>
> (p. 93)

Unwanted sexualities can be thought to be symbolized in the horror genre films where a monster or supernatural forces threaten a small-town idyll, or in films where an evil spirit sets out to threaten the security and unity of a family.

There are, of course, other possible interpretations: the monster may equally be thought to symbolize, for example, domestic violence, alcoholism or politics. For example, Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) has been repeatedly described as an analogy of Cold War anxities regarding communist infiltration, atomic warfare, and hyperconformity. In the end, each subjective experience of a film determines the final interpretation.

Wood (2001) argues, that while some "*basic* repression" is a necessary for the organization of a human civilization, it would not be necessary to repress and exclude so many things thoroughly. This excess repression, according to

Wood, makes us "monogamous bourgeois-patriarchal capitalists" (p. 25).

PART II: FINDING YOURSELF IN THE SHADOWS

> *How pathetic it is to describe these things which can't truly be described.*
> *— Vampire Lestat in Interview with the Vampire*

> *Who are you? Who am I?*
> — Face to Face, Siouxie and the Banshees

I remember when I was about 15 years old and I was drawing a cartoon—as I often did, as a hobby. In this particular story a boy of my own age would meet another boy like him. For a long time, I tried to figure out how the encounter could take place: I mean, how would the protagonist know the other boy liked boys too? I ended up with a solution, that the other boy had an earring with some sign—such as the male symbol—that would reveal his "orientation". This solution in my comic story seems somewhat a naive solution, a fabrication of a teenager who does not yet have much life experience (although I remember hearing couple of years earlier in school that "homos" wore earring in their left ear, usually as a joke.) Of course, at that age, feeling being one of a kind was my real-

ity. I had read books and I knew that around 4% of guys in my schools should be like me, but still I had no idea who they *could* be. Obviously in the early 90's there was no internet, nor was there any kind of rainbow/LGBTQ groups in my hometown, at least none that I was of aware of. Homosexuality — despite being gay myself—was an abstraction to me, a number on a page of some (usually American) psychology book.

Despite the naivete of my approach, on the other hand gay men have always had to develop different strategies to recognize and to meet up with other gay men, whether it was because of hiding from the law or simply to avoid uncomfortable misunderstandings. For example, in the '60s and '70s gay culture hanky codes were used to signal sexual interests in an age when seeking or having gay sex could get you arrested. Gay men have also used certain areas in cities to meet up, such as specific parks and of course gay bars.

Recognizing other gays has been a problem of the gay community itself, but also a cause of anxiety to a homophobic society. The invisibility and uncertainty surrounding homosexuality has led to development of different theories (often highly fictional) and ways to distinguish a gay male body from the heterosexual male body. (I will return to this subject matter shortly.) The ability of a minoritarian subject to pass as a member of majority, for example a gay man's ability to pass as straight, is usually referred to as p*assing*. Passing may result in privileges, and increase social acceptance as well as be used to cope with stigma. Thus, passing can be self-pro-

tection in instances where expressing one's identity may be dangerous (Renfrow 2004).

BODY AS A TEXT

In *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman (1994) explores the ways in which "homosexual identity" is defined through assimilation into the tradition of Western culture. Edelman describes that "homosexuality is to heterosexuality what writing is to speech, because the concept of homosexuality is produced culturally primarily only within writing, or textuality. The term *homographesis* is derived from the grammatical term *homograph*, which refers to two or more words that are similar in spelling but have different meanings (pp. 12-13), such as the English word "bear", which can denote an animal species or a verb. Edelman's use of the term thus refers, among other things, to the "identical" similarity of the bodies of a heterosexual and a homosexual man (p. 13).

Historically, this similarity has led to paranoid theories about various "signs" that can be read from an individual man's body, or his gestures, in order to identify the "artificial masculinity" of a homosexual man while maintaining the privileged and natural heterosexual masculinity of the "real" man. Edelman says, "in such a social situation, a homosexual is put to suffer the stigma of writing or textuality as a fundamental expression of his identity and anatomy" (p. 12).

To observe how these notions have come to be, we need to go further back, to the Europe of Victorian era, where

the concept of homosexuality was first created. In the late 19th century, the bourgeoisie, to secure the continuation of their class, raised *reproduction* as the primary purpose of sexuality. The bourgeoisie saw sexual "abnormalities" as hereditary and dangerous to the survival of their own class. In the puritanistic atmosphere of the Victorian era, all forms of sexuality, with the exception of heterosexual monogamy, raised suspicions and were often considered a sexual disorder (Foucault 1980). With increasing intensity and authority, a number of different forms of sexuality, such as zoophiles, automonosexualists, gynecomasts, along with hysterical women and masturbating children, were brought to the "objective" light of science, of which homosexuality, among others, was criminalized and psychiatrized. With the help of medicialization, heterosexuality was able to naturalize its position by defining itself as the opposite of the unnaturalness of homosexuality (see i.e. Foucault 1980).

Also Oscar Wilde's famous trial in 1895, in which he was sentenced to two years of hard labor for sodomy, helped shift the public's focus to "the other Victorians" (Schaffrath 2002, p. 98). Multiple theories about homosexuality were developed by doctors and researchers of the era, including Italian physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who claimed to have developed a physiological profile that allows, for law enforcement purposes, the identification of "sexually abnormal" (p. 5). The conception of homosexuality was evident in both science and the arts, allowing writers like John Addington Symonds (1840-1893)—known as one of the few

defenders of homosexuality in his day— to describe homosexuality as "lust written in the face." Homosexuality was assumed to be seen as paleness, fragility, fearfulness, and femininity. Similarly, the homosexual narrator in the pornographic novel *Teleny* (1893) (whose author is unknown, but is often attributed to Oscar Wilde) describes that as God marked Cain, it seemed that his (homosexuality) was marked on his body: "Like Cain, it seemed as if I carried my crime written upon my brow. I saw a sneer upon the face of every man that looked at me. A finger was for ever pointing at me; a voice, loud enough for all to hear, was whispering, 'The sodomite!'" (p.5).

PART III: VAMPIRES

In some horror film subgenres, such as vampire and werewolf stories, figuring out the monster's actual identity by looking for physiological indicators is a prevalent theme. For example, in *Silver Bullet* (1985), a paraplegic young boy Marty goes out at night of Fourth of July celebrations to light fireworks. He is then confronted by a werewolf, but escapes the monster after launching a rocket into the creatures eye. Later in the movie, Marty's sister discovers that Reverend Lowe, a town priest, is missing his left eye; This bodily sign, physical trauma, reveals him as the werewolf. In *The Omen* (1976), American diplomat Robert Thorn and his wife Katherine adopt a child, Damien. As the movie progresses, Father Brennan starts to suspect that Damien is the Antichrist. Meanwhile, Robert and Keith travel to Israel to meet Carl Bugen-

hagen, an archaeologist and expert on the Antichrist; he explains that if Damien is the true Antichrist he will bear a birthmark in the shape of three sixes somewhere on his body.

Monsters and gay men share a similar stigma of textuality in their anatomy. In these horror stories, the monster usually *passes* as a human, at least for some of the time: werewolves appear only during the full moon and vampires victims carry the stigma of penetration literally as the bite marks on their necks.

Reading bodily signs of course also has useful real life applications in fields such as medical sciences, biology and so on. Many diseases have been and are still recognized by first hand visual observations, from different rashes and allergies to skin cancers and the notorious AIDS-defining Kaposi's sarcoma. However, the human history has also witnessed pseudosciences where the bodily marks or different features of the body have been theorized to be signs of witchhood, racial inferiority or general proclivity to crime.

In 1897, Bram Stoker hit the goldmine when Dracula—a story filled with sex, blood and death—was published. The description of vampirism as a contagious demonic disease sank into the public in Victorian Europe, where tuberculosis and syphilis were common. According to Schaffer (1997), the epidemiological horror fiction, including *Dracula*, encodes the fear and anxiety of the homophobic society, that is, homosexuals want to "corrupt" heterosexuals (p. 481).

Schaffrath (2002) analyses how, in Bram Stoker's book, the vampire represents social chaos and threatens Eng-

lish gender roles (p. 98). According to the author, blood-sucking is a metaphor for intercourse when a vampire's tusks sink into the victim's neck and the act gives birth to a new vampire. As the victims of vampire are both men and women, so the vampire can be interpreted as bisexual, but also "hermaphroditic", possessing both male and female "essence". This vampiric two-sex model can be associated with homosexuality, because at the turn of the century, homosexuals were seen neither as men or women, but as their intermediate form. (Schaffer 1997, p. 472).

Although vampire tales precede the Victorian era by centuries, these creatures gained huge popularity and were closely tied — as was homosexuality — with the **science** of the era. Fears of disease and decay, elicited by venerial diseases and plagues, were reflected in the vampire stories and other gothic novels.

THE '80S, '90S AND AIDS

> *In 1984, having known about AIDS for little more than one year, I began to realize that there is language that can kill me or, more insidiously, language that can persuade me to kill myself.*[8]
>
> — Ellis Hanson (1991).

As far as I remember, the public discussions regarding cinema, media and art in the '90s Finland seemed to revolve around subversiveness of representations, for example movie violence and sex. Also postmodern art and its "ugliness" was on people's lips. While post modern art was not exactly a *new* movement in the 90's, it reached it's peak in the 80's and '90s and the general public caught up (Hicks 2004, p. 10). Coincidentally or not, these same decades witnessed the arrival of AIDS, contagious throught sex and bodily fluids, blood and sperm.

In 1995, Kiasma, the museum of contemporary art in Helsinki exhibited Plenge Jakobsen's *White Love* (1994-1995), an installation with blenders filled with blood, urine and sperm which famously appalled the public. The stench of secretions aroused nausea, and part of the audience feared that they would get HIV from the splashing blood. The dismay of the audience obscured Jakobsen's idea of pure love in the

AIDS era. For the organisers, causing a controversy proved to be a successful format.

Much like in the Victorian era, where plague, venerial diseases and new sciences influenced the popularity of vampire stories, the arrival of AIDS marked a rise in the popularity of vampire stories again (although vampires were never really gone.) In many cases, the vampire was revamped (pun intended) and the genre was injected with some new blood (another pun) by the prevalent scientific notions. The vampire was no longer just a hidden metaphor for homosexuality, but many writers and filmmakers consciously harnessed this cultural association—for example in, Anne Rice's novels and their movie adaptation *Interview with the Vampire* (1992).

In many ways, the vampires came out of the closet, and in some cases (in true postmodernist style) they were granted the position of a protagonist, and in some cases it was humans that were the enemy.

The beginning of the AIDS crisis emphasized the monstrosity of the homosexual condition again, as Benshoff (1997/2001) argues: "now more than ever, gay men are contagions – vampires – who, with a single mingling of blood, can infect a pure and innocent victim, transforming him or her into the living dead" (p. 92). Simon Watney (1987) noted that "Aids commentary does not 'make' gay men into monsters, for homosexuality is, and always has been, constructed as intrinsically monstrous within the heavily over-determined images inside which notions of 'decency,' 'human nature,' and so on are mobilized and relayed throughout the internal circuitry of

the mass media marketplace" (p. 42). Much like in Lee Edelman's (1993) description of gay man's body as text, AIDS too was "a[…]pathological condition but also[…]an entrenched, proliferating text", which embodies both "a physical and a social death" (Vallorani 2011, p. 211).

As the study of the AIDS literature have been noted in recent decades, abjection and textuality combine in the body marked by injuries and lesions formed on the skin. The visually marked, infected body is perceived as a "feminine, exposed text" that ultimately reveals a gay persons "hidden identity", reflecting the insistent desire of homophobic discourse to catch "false identities". Abject bodies are essential in a homophobic culture in order for a "normal" body to be understood (Kekki 2004, p. 11).

On a positive note, horror is a genre of film that specifically activates queer viewership through its conventional structure, such as the disintegration of social order and the themes of beings rejected by society. As Benshoff (1997/2001) writes, the monster of horror films is often seen as a "force that tries to prevent heterosexual romance," (p. 93) and monster films can be understood as depicting the outbreak of some kind of queer sexuality in the middle of a heterosexual environment. Benshoff believes that homosexuality is culturally constructed alongside and through the concepts of monster, sexual anxiety, and illness, and says that films allow audiences to *both* demonize the "enemy" of films and provide a surface of identification for *queer viewers* (p.93). Depending on the viewer position of the film, the monster can

thus be seen as a threat or an object of identification - or both. Benshoff mimics Judith Butler's idea that the subject position of the film's monster is more readily achievable for viewers who (figuratively and literally) reside in subjects in "non-viable zones" —that is, those already outside the patriarchal and heterosexist order.

> *To comprehend the vampire is to recognize that abjected space that gay men are obliged to inhabit; that space uspeakable or unnameable, itself defined as orifice, as a "dark continent" men dare not penetrate; that gap bridged over or sutured together, where men cease to play dead and yet cease to accept the normative sexual role. I am seen as the caped one, who hovers over the dreaming body of Jonathan Harker and exclaims, "This man belongs to me!" And "Yes, I too can love." I dare to speak and sin and walk abroad; and so like Lucy Westenra in her bed, Renfield in his cell, Dracula in his castle, I inhabit the space of all vampires, caught between our two twin redemptions: conversion and death.*
> (Hanson 1994, 325-326) (Politics and Poetics of Camp).

AFTERTHOUGHT: THE REAL MONSTER

> *Man is the cruelest animal. At tragedies, bullfights, and crucifixions he has so far felt best on earth; and when he invented hell for himself, behold, that was his very heaven.*
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche

Valerie Solanas (2004) used the concept of projection as counter-strategy in her highly controversial SCUM Manifesto in 1967. In the text, Solanas attempts to reverse the sexist associations of women as weak, emotional and "less than men." Solanas claims that forementioned qualities are, in fact, male qualities, which *men* (I read this as a synonym for patriarchy) project onto women. In Solanas' manifesto, the real monster is Man, who has, by an elaborate scam, fooled us to believe that the Other is the monster. The real motivation behind patriarchal misogyny is the fact that men, deep down, want to be women—a kind of a reversed penis envy.

Men have, as Solanas (2004) writes, "done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men". SCUM manifesto is not particularly friendly towards all women either. Solanas describes women who voluntarily submit to male domination as "daddy's girls".

Solanas' manifesto was provocative also in it's goal "to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system,

institute complete automation and destroy the male sex" as well as in SCUM's *not* unearned reputation as anti-trans. Her position is similar to TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminist) trolling point that trans people reinforce an oppressive gender binary. It can be concluded that Solanas's chromosomal standard for maleness, which she establishes right away in her manifesto, offers no exception for trans women.

A tiny piece of sympathy for men can be found in Solanas' writing, when she states that a feminine, sissy gay man—while still deeply flawed—is the most tolerable kind of man as they are openly manifesting their desire to be female.

Andrea Long Chu (2019) is a transgender writer, who has been praised for starting a second wave in trans studies with her writing on Solanas. Chu disputes Solanas' labeling as a transphobe, particularly as one linked with second-wave radical feminism, which Solanas contempted. Regardless of whether Solanas was transphobic or not, she was a sex essentialist. Whatever amazing observations one may find from the text, this is SCUM's fundamental disqualifying defect. Its many charms are undeniable, but so is the reality that it calls for the Holocaust—it specifically mentions gas chambers and "degenerate "art" (p. 12).

As far as we can consider Solanas as a *high-camp satirist*, we can at least find her clear observations on patriarchy and misogyny parodically on point. If we, using Solanas' example, flip the associations with heteronormativity and homosexuality, we can see that many of the things homosexuals are accused of, can be turned right back to straight male

culture:, for example gay men as hypersexual, as rapists, as pedophiles violence, as narcissistic, as murderous and so forth.

Patriarchy and heteronormativity seem fragile in the sense that they do not bare any challenging, which can be witnessed in the sheer force used to marginalize anyone who deviates from the norm. Paradoxically, masculinity, which is claimed to be the natural state of a male body, still has to be earned. In other words, if one does not constantly reassure their status as a male, the facade is threatening to crumble down.

CONCLUSIONS

What is the relationship between two essays presented in this thesis? As stated in the thesis' introduction, starting point for these essays was to write about movies and gay/queer spectatorship and homophobia or: identification and projection—the psychological mechanisms of familiarity, admiration and alienation. What is common in these mechanisms, is that both are about reflecting imagined feelings or qualities onto others—either in a positive or negative manner.

The purpose of this paper was about mapping out, in the context of visual culture, some kind of common ground for the experience of growing up and being gay. In other words, inspect how does it "feel" to be gay. In the introduction of this paper, I laid down research questions: how are gay men and homosexuality represented in mainstream films, in characters that are not explicitly gay men? How do gay men experience identification with female characters in films? What are the typically "gay" ways of looking at cinema and it's characters, plots, and themes ? How is homophobia linked or projected into monsters of horror films?

My two essays were set to answer these questions. The question "how" leaves room for interpretation and the answers depend largely about who do you ask? In terms of theoretical background, I have looked for answers in the texts of mainly gay and/or queer authors, relying also on my own experience and intuition as a queer person and a gay man.

I have certainly answered these questions to myself, or at least started to understand the "nature of homosexuality" or at least what kind of cultural and historical reasons contribute to it and why being gay seems so *different*. Much of it is related with the fantastic, the camp and the queer, which are not only theoretical and lingual concepts, but they also have a physical, embodied side.

Based on my research, it seems that gay men, as an audience, when attracted to fantastic/camp/queer representations, because: 1. They have been deprived of images that repsentent them explicitly. Even now most of the gay representations, for example, tend to be heteronormative stereotypes of gay men. 2. This deprivation and conscious or subconscious feelings of being othered emphasizes escapism into the world of fantastic, away from boring and "normal" life, reminiscent of heterosexuality. 3. Not been thought as "real men" (and maybe we are not?) can cause a kind of rebellion and dislike of stereotypical heteronormative roles.

A gay man, as feminine or at least feminized, is the source of anxiety for heteronormative culture. As he is visually "identical" to straight men, but his gender nonformityinsults the traditional gender conventons and roles. A gay man is seen, unlike other men, to allow himself to be penetrated—at least in the imaginations of some people.

There seems to be a chasm between *gay men* and the term *homosexuality*. Let me explain further. While the term homosexuality refers to "sexual or romantic attraction to oth-

ers of one's same sex : the quality or state of being gay[9]", the broader cultural connotations of the word suggest a much larger baggage of meaning. According to this dictionary definition, homosexuality is not only sexual or romantic attraction, but also something gay men embody, a "quality" and a "state". In contrast to homosexuality, in the definition of heterosexuality[10] only the attraction part is mentioned—no mention of quality of being straight. The difference in these definitions is descriptive of the excess surrounding homosexuality and the naturalness of heterosexuality—only being gay is an identity, while straight is not.

While *gay*—as an established, sometimes even normative identity category—is pretty straightforward, *homosexuality* seems to float in ether, as some kind of marvelous *and* terrible hybrid of a goddess and a monster. Perhaps this chimera is a mixture of all the 150 years of history of the word. After all, it was born together with Victorian age sciences and fairytales. It is, then, no wonder that being gay or queer feels larger-than-life (Doty 1993; Martin 1994) and that there's is a fascination to the fantastic and otherwordly in queer identities.

Gender and sexuality are important factors in identification (Butler 2006; deLauretis 2002) because gender and sexuality are—to most people—culturally important building pieces of peoples identities. What is excluded from identifications is left outside and if one feels particularly opposed to

[9] Merriam-Webster, 10.5.2021.

[10] Merriam-Webser, 10.5.2021.

something, that thing can turn into an abject. All this happens in a constant push and pull with the heteronormative culture, feeding on to eachother, but in good and in bad.

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